



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

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## **THESIS**

**THE JESUITS: HISTORY'S MOST EFFECTIVE SPECIAL  
OPERATORS**

by

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December 2007

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**THE JESUITS: HISTORY'S MOST EFFECTIVE SPECIAL OPERATORS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Jesuits have made inroads to an astonishing number of societies, becoming firmly established in vastly disparate cultures. Sixteenth century Jesuit missions to China, India, and Japan appear to form a useful model for contemporary U.S. special operators seeking influence in infinitely different societies from their own. The practice of first establishing respect, then influence, and eventually working for religious conversion proved far more effective than the relatively forceful tack taken by Dominican and Franciscan missionaries. We propose to examine the most successful Jesuit practices, create a general model of their approach, and draw parallels to similar contemporary challenges to special operators.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	SEMANTICS .....	2
B.	SCOPE.....	3
II.	INDIA .....	5
A.	JESUIT EFFORTS .....	9
B.	LESSONS FROM INDIA .....	18
III.	CHINA.....	19
A.	JESUIT EFFORTS AND RESULTS.....	21
B.	LESSONS FROM CHINA .....	25
IV.	JAPAN.....	27
A.	JESUIT EFFORTS AND THE JAPANESE OUTCOME.....	30
B.	LESSONS FROM JAPAN.....	35
V.	MEANS, ENDS, AND ENDINGS .....	37
A.	AN EXAMINATION OF THE MEANS .....	39
B.	THE JESUIT SPECIAL OPERATIONS METHOD DISTILLED.....	40
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	45
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	49
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	51

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The essence of missionary aim is to influence the behavior, belief, and ultimately, the ideology of disparate peoples in foreign lands. While the proselytizer's motivations are ostensibly benevolent, it is undeniable that the missionary goal is to modify, and to a large extent replace, existing cultural norms endemic to the objective population. Though there are clear and significant differences in the philosophy and ideology of church missionaries and modern special operations personnel, the two groups share the daunting task of garnering trust, respect, and influence in a foreign and potentially hostile culture. Likewise, church missionaries and special operators find themselves similarly positioned between an ideological arbiter, or parent organization (the Catholic Church in the missionary case, and the U.S. Government and/or U.S. Army in the Special Operations case) and the foreign population of interest. It is therefore useful to examine effective methods of cultural influence employed by missionaries in foreign countries to extract a functional cultural influence framework for special operations applications. In this context, the missionary activities of the Jesuits, or Society of Jesus, provides a particularly strong structure for exerting influence in vastly dissimilar cultures.

The particular philosophies of the Catholic Church and the U.S. Government are not instructively parallel, beyond a few pragmatic and cursory likenesses. For example, proselytes and political converts both enjoy the tangible and intangible fruits (and thorns) of their transformation; likewise, government and church both reap the benefits of additional contributions to the collective coffers, and enjoy the agreeable personal behavior of their newfound constituents. The Vatican is and was the apex of a highly formalized hierarchy (Moran, 1993, p. 2), a position Washington occupies today. Papal interpretation of religious tenets and rituals formed the de facto political and legal substance of the Catholic hierarchy (Neill, 1985, Ch. 4), permitting a functional parallel between the U.S. Government and the Catholic Church despite the immediate

and obvious ideological disparity between secular and religious institutions. Hence, while philosophical parallels fall far short of perfection, the *roles* the U.S. Government and Catholic Church play(ed) in the enterprise of ideological conversion and behavioral influence are similar.

This study is concerned entirely with the instruments of influence, both personal and societal, and is unconcerned with the merits of the underlying philosophies. Religious and political constructs, where ideological conversion is concerned, are internally consistent at best and solipsistic at worst. Incontrovertible proof of one ideology's superiority to another simply does not exist. Proselytizing, whether political or religious, is thus largely an exercise in replacing one tautology with another. It is, however, unavoidably necessary to illustrate many of the elements and fundamentals of influence in the context of opposing ideologies, impossible without enumerating many specific religious tenets and social norms. Hopefully opposing creeds find neutral description.

Finally, this study is unrelated to the moral question of whether members of a given political or religious school of thought *ought* to proselytize, and if so, under which conditions. Rather, recognizing that a significant component of the U.S. military and diplomatic establishment exists primarily for foreign ideological influence in the pursuit of U.S. national interests, our concentration is on establishing an effective political and social influence framework to efficiently cross profound cultural divides.

## **A. SEMANTICS**

It is necessary to address the nebulous understanding of "special operations" that has come to encompass a vast array of military capabilities. Current connotations emphasize the personnel insertion techniques, advanced gadgetry and weaponry, specialized physical training, and clandestine nature of direct action operations applicable to situations with a clear enemy to strike; common modern understanding (and to a surprising extent, modern military doctrine) of "special operations" downplay the aspect with which this study is

involved: influencing citizens of other countries to act in a way supportive of U.S. national interests, an endeavor with clear parallels to religious conversion.

The matter of conversion invariably gives rise to existential questions of degree: to what extent has a given individual truly embraced a once-foreign ideology? What is the level of belief that differentiates “interested parties” from “converts?” Finally, and most problematically, to what extent is a person’s depth of conviction knowable or understandable? Such queries are intriguing but hopelessly unanswerable, except to the extent that belief begets behavior. For our purposes, a “convert” both proclaims allegiance to a given ideology or entity, and conducts himself in a way clearly identifiable with his new belief system. This working definition does not unrealistically require adherence to every new philosophical prescription and proscription, as selective adherence is endemic to creeds of all ilk, but it is sufficiently limiting to eliminate converts of convenience with dubious motivations.

As we are interested only in effective elements of influence, and our chosen measure of successful sway requires both profession of conversion and appropriately altered personal behavior, it is profitable and permissible to assume for this argument that both special operators and missionaries attempt to gain “converts,” “believers,” “followers,” and “supporters.” In that limited sense, special operators and missionaries strive for the same goals.

## **B. SCOPE**

Missionary efforts are as old as religion, more varied than organized belief itself, and as widespread as human civilization. Reliable historical citation is significantly less prevalent, and well-documented missionary activity within recognizable social and political constructs is rarer still. Further, as our aim is methodology rather than substance, few periods contain significant accounts of varied missionary tactics within a common political and social structure. Finally, even fewer historical periods match the previous criteria within a cross-section of disparate regions available for examination.

The period between 1540 and 1773 satisfies all of these requirements. The year 1540 coincides with the beginning of the Society of Jesus and their entrance into the missionary field alongside the Franciscan and Dominican missionary orders, all subsets of the Roman Catholic Church (Moran, 1993, p. 1). Significantly, while highly successful, Jesuit missionary techniques sufficiently clashed with the Franciscan and Dominican approaches to arouse the unwelcome interest of several papal inquiries, and in fact contributed in large part to the dissolution of the Society in 1773 (Neill, 1985, p. 124). Thus, there is a rich record of the distinct missionary methodologies of the period, instructive for a method-centered study.

Within this era, three regions stand out as most valuable for their historical and biographical abundance, as well as their evolving political structures. India, Japan, and China all experienced significant missionary activity by different Catholic orders while their political systems evolved from feudal to national incarnations. Further, there was no dearth of European economic and political interest in these regions (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 6), creating a controversial social backdrop to missionary efforts very similar to that experienced by modern U.S. special operations personnel. Finally, the political, cultural and ideological characteristics are sufficiently varied between regions to permit distillation of a useful political and social influence heuristic applicable in a wide variety of special operations circumstances.

Jesuit missionaries overcame the profound obstacles of language, culture, and existing ideology within their target societies to achieve substantial, even surprising success. Their experience illuminates a clear structure for influence, particularly useful in a wide variety of special operations. Both Jesuits and special operators arrive amidst foreign cultures with a lifetime of entirely alien norms and experiences. What the determined interloper makes of the cultural chasm ultimately determines the success of his evangelistic effort, regardless of creed.

## II. INDIA

While the missionary's challenge is profound under the best of circumstances, it is difficult to imagine a more difficult set of conditions than those encountered by Francis Xavier as he set foot on Indian soil in 1542 (Moran, 1993, p. 1). As the first missionary to the far east, and in fact the first Jesuit missionary abroad since the order's recognition in 1540 by Pope Paul III (Moran, 1993, p. 1), Xavier could hardly have chosen a pricklier array of political, social, linguistic, and religious norms than those with which Indian culture greeted his Society of Jesus.

Indian society functioned in a stringently if fractiously codified manner. Cultural underpinnings centered on three major influences: a largely feudal political construct, the Hindu faith, and the all-encompassing caste system, of which the latter was the "keystone of Hindu social life" (Arumairaj in Amaladass, 1988, p. 32). "Caste rules were better respected than government laws," and determined such basic elements of personal existence as vocation, food, habitation, marriage, education, and every component of social interaction (Arumairaj in Amaladass, 1988, p. 32). Though formal caste divisions were virtually innumerable, four major class stratifications formed the backbone of Indian society: lowest were the *Sudras*, or cultivators; next were *Vaisyas*, the trading class; governors and soldiers (of the *Kshatriya* class) outranked the previous two, but were subservient to the *Brahmins*, the scholars and priests of the day (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 302). Caste law strictly forbade marriage between castes, and the principle of "craft exclusiveness," where each follows the profession of his group and no other, was enforced with similar vigor (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 302).

While class divisions alone would have made for thorny missionary interaction, certain caste characteristics complicated matters exponentially. Three languages separated the four major classes, and each tongue possessed a highly nuanced protocol for addressing members of superior and inferior sub-

castes (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 302). Thus, foreigners with even a strong understanding of a caste's language were prone to unwitting catastrophes of status in daily discourse, making ideological influence problematic at best.

A particularly striking component of caste division was the stridently enforced untouchability law, wherein a higher-caste individual could not touch the person or possessions of a member of a lower caste. Even inadvertent contact with an article connected to or touched by a low class person might "pollute" his superior, a custom that created a social minefield out of the activities of daily living (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 302). Interaction between classes was rare and ritualized in order to protect the lower classes from the ire generated by inappropriate contact with superiors, and to protect the upper castes from being defiled by commoners.

In missionary eyes, perhaps the most nefarious of India's caste traditions centered on the treatment of widows, who had very few honorable economic or social opportunities, were required to shave their heads (Velinkar in Amaladass, 1988, p. 75), and were not allowed to remarry (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 303). A widow's financial security and identity largely died with her spouse, leading to the grisly practice of *sati*, wherein the widow immolated herself in the funeral pyre of her late husband (Arumairaj in Amaladass, 1988, p. 35). *Sati* was a poignant exclamation to the sharp clash between the seemingly dehumanizing Indian caste laws and the longstanding Catholic doctrine emphasizing individual equality in the eyes of the divine.

As if the complex languages and diametric opposition between the Hindu caste system and Catholic ideology were not obstacle enough, the Jesuits were forced to operate within a social climate severely prejudiced against Europeans, and particularly Portuguese. In part due to the strongly Christian European tradition, Portuguese traders had completely ignored caste law for decades prior to Jesuit arrival (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 303). As a result of intermarriage and commingling between castes, Portuguese traders became a



separate caste unto themselves (the *Paranghi*), shunned and vilified by even the lowest classes (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 305). Any Indian interface with Europeans thus carried an attendant risk of violating caste restrictions, as it was difficult to discern between *Paranghi* and others of European descent. Portuguese indiscretions thus created a formidable barrier to Jesuit efforts; in fact, “it was thought impossible to convert any Hindu as they despised the Portuguese and the [caste practices] which they followed” (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, pp. 308-309).

The political situation was equally complicated, as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Indian society experienced a many-sided struggle “between the Great Mughal, the lesser Indian rulers, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, and the French” (Correia-Afonso, 1969, p. 49). Poor colonial behavior on the part of the various European interests frequently angered local, regional, and even national seats of indigenous Indian power, and Jesuit efforts depended to a large extent on the state of relations between European emissaries and the pertinent Indian feudal lords (Correia-Afonso, 1969, p. 134). Missionaries were frequently caught in the middle, and were even temporarily tossed out of coastal India by Pombal, a regional ruler irate with Portuguese trade and caste practices (Correia-Afonso, 1969, p. 135). Any Jesuit action inevitably required dealings with independent and semi-independent sovereigns in India who wielded “despotic sway over their subjects” (Correia-Afonso, 1969, p. 8), as “religious and political interests were so inextricably mixed in those days that activity in one field often involved activity in the other” (Correia-Afonso, 1969, p. 77).

A further political complication during Jesuit tenure in India arose from the decline of Portuguese power in India, the concomitant disintegration of the Moghul empire (which had somewhat tenuously united India’s feudal regions), and “the endless regional and minor wars to which these [events] gave rise” (Neill, 1985, p. 71). Thus, in addition to profound caste, racial, and language difficulties, Jesuits faced a capricious and volatile political morass.

Religious tradition mirrored India's social and political complexity. The Hindu faith was comprised of such convolution as to be nearly doctrinally impenetrable, and was perpetuated more through oral history and mythology than written works (Heart of Hinduism, 2004). In effect, "Hinduism has neither a common doctrine nor a single scripture as the source of its various teachings," is relatively unconcerned with any form of orthodoxy, and encourages "relative freedom of thought within tightly defined codes of conduct and morality" (Heart of Hinduism, 2004). Hinduism is characterized by a determined synthesis of religion and philosophy, and the marriage of "religious commitment with a reflective search for truth" (Heart of Hinduism, 2004). Followers seek to understand an "eternal law that governs everyone irrespective of belief," glimpses of which were "divinely revealed to ancient sages" and passed down through generations of oral accounts and narrative customs (Heart of Hinduism, 2004). The result is a disparate collection of Hindu interpretations and understandings that vary with geography and the influence of prominent individual teachers, a faith impossible to characterize monolithically with sufficient specificity to be useful for missionary purposes.

Further complicating Jesuit comprehension of Indian religious teaching and philosophy is Hinduism's remarkably absorptive theological and theoretical tradition: "as Hinduism developed, it did not reject its parent traditions, but modified and assimilated them into newer schools of thought" (Heart of Hinduism, 2004). There are relatively few explicit or *de facto* obstacles to modifying or reinterpreting Hindu doctrine, and there are no special personal prerequisites to satisfy prior to participating in Hinduism's continual theological metamorphosis. Thus, the resulting amoebic agglomeration permits happy cohabitation of such inherent contradictions as monism and pluralism in the same religious system—particularly vexing for a strongly monotheistic Jesuit tradition (Heart of Hinduism, 2004). Hinduism's consolidating convention produced highly personalized, infinitely varied manifestations, typified chiefly by reluctance to "declare allegiance to a particular faith, belief, or creed," again

anathema in Catholic doctrine (Heart of Hinduism, 2004). Perhaps most problematic was the Hindu concept of previous birth, or reincarnation, which held that souls inhabit bodies in future lives commensurate with the quality of their piety in previous existences (Gnanapragasam in Amaladass, 1988, p 177); this belief contrasts sharply with Catholic notions of salvation and an eternal afterlife. Certainly, Catholicism enjoyed precious few agreements with Hindu conventions.

It was not just the political, cultural, linguistic, and religious environments that appeared to conspire against Jesuit intentions, but the physical environment seemed truculent as well. Not even the weather befriended the Jesuits. India's stifling heat and humidity, as well as the perpetually soggy monsoon, made misery close company for missionaries accustomed to Europe's temperate comfort. A host of unfamiliar ailments accompanied the clammy climate, making for a grim adaptation to life in India. The magnitude of the Jesuit missionaries' task was beyond daunting, and each success would undoubtedly be hard-won.

#### **A. JESUIT EFFORTS**

Despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to ideological conversion posed by the exceedingly complex Indian social and political structure, the Jesuits achieved substantial successes between 1542 and 1773. Three years after Xavier's arrival in India, the Jesuits had established a seminary in Goa, India, with sixty Indian students learning secular as well as Catholic subjects to an impressive depth (Velinkar in Amaladass, 1988, p. 68). By 1556, over 450 students populated the college of higher learning, a number that swelled to seven hundred by 1575 (Velinkar in Amaladass, 1988, pp. 69-70). By 1608, there were over fifteen Jesuit schools and colleges in the coastal provinces (Velinkar in Amaladass, 1988, p. 72). While Jesuit educational attainments are striking, the number of Indian converts to Catholicism was far more extraordinary: conservative estimates suggest a total of over 30,000 proselytes in 1661; the number grew to 75,000 by 1688, and more than 90,000 in 1705 (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 308). By 1760, just prior to the Society's suppression by the Portuguese government and the Pope, Jesuit missionaries shepherded a

population of over 200,000 converts (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 308). Jesuits accomplished such feats with an incredibly small cadre of missionaries. At the height of their density, Jesuits numbered just over a thousand (Neill, 1985, pp. 71-72). Undoubtedly, the Society acquitted itself impressively under what can only be described as trying circumstances.

As the difficult Indian social landscape suggests, Jesuits first had to master the pragmatisms of mere existence in Indian society prior to attempting any proselytizing venture. Initially, questions of faith were undoubtedly secondary to issues of survival and sustenance for Jesuit missionaries as they answered the formidable challenge of fitting in to such an alien society. Influence certainly required confluence, on a far more than rudimentary plane.

The most basic trial was one of communication: “it did not take the Jesuit missionaries long to realize that it was imperative for them to master the local languages” (Correia-Afonso, 1969, p. 59). In stark contrast to Franciscan and Dominican missionaries, who “did not even learn the local languages,” (Duignan, 1958, p. 727), Jesuits embraced complex Indian languages with vigor:

Hence most of the Jesuit Missionaries set to work to master the vernaculars and many were eminently successful. As they became more at home in India, some of them read Indian Books and studied Indian Philosophy, not merely with the idea of refuting it, but from a desire to profit by it. The greatest of them, men like De Nobili, Provenca and Beschi became masters of the local language and were able to establish close contact with the people and know their conditions intimately.

(Arumairaj in Amaladass, 1988, p. 27).

Perhaps no Jesuit linguist was as eminent as the luminary De Nobili, who learned all three of India’s most significant languages with amazing alacrity. According to his contemporary Laerzio, De Nobili commanded Tamil, the language of the *Brahmin*, “with such perfection and grace that all, who hear him, listen to him with admiration and pleasure” (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 310). Beschi devoured the local languages with similar energy, and both

missionaries instilled by example a culture of rigorous linguistic study among their peers and subordinates. As a result of their unprecedented mastery of Indian dialects, Jesuits under Beschi's and De Nobili's auspices attained a level of linguistic aplomb that permitted effective discourse not just over mundane subjects, but also over the sublime, requiring a highly nuanced command of Indian languages. The level of effort required to attain such ability was extraordinary, but expert language skills were entirely necessary in order to exert the level of philosophical influence conversion demands.

Language skills permitted daily existence as well as influence, and also served to enlighten the Jesuits regarding the subtleties of Indian politics. Rather than shun or defy the banalities of secular hierarchical establishments, as the Franciscan and Dominican missionary orders disastrously preferred (Duignan, 1958, p. 727), the Jesuits recognized and capitalized on the realities of the political element of human society. Jesuits believed that Indian rulers at all levels deserved the opportunity to embrace Catholic ideology, and recognized that the esteem of local lords and regional rulers afforded vast latitude to pursue conversion of the masses. Thus, in a concerted effort that was both idealistically and pragmatically inspired, Jesuit missionaries strove to influence the influential.

As political leaders tended to enjoy greater intellectual development and far more esoteric interests than their subjects, Jesuit missionaries' twelve to fifteen years of formal education in arts, humanities, and sciences, completed well prior to venturing afar to foreign lands, paid enormous dividends. Jesuits were able to converse intelligently over a vast array of disciplines, and instruct instinctively on even the most abstruse of subjects. As "the average Jesuit missionary in India was a man of culture, observation and judgment," the Society gained the admiration and affirmation of many prominent Indian figures (Correia-Afonso, 1969, p. 59). For example, the ruler of the Vijayanagara province, Venkata II, held an interest in the burgeoning science of the stars; accordingly, two Jesuit astronomers visited his court in 1593 to discuss astronomical events with the local legate. As a result of their command of the discipline, "the Fathers

were held in great esteem at [Venkata's] court," and the Society enjoyed substantial patronage in the Vijayanagare province (Correia-Afonso, 1969, p. 59).

Undoubtedly, currying favor with local leaders in a tumultuous feudal society carried risk; frequent depositions caused cyclical political support. Jesuits would frequently win the goodwill of one leader, enjoy a period of aid and favor, then despair to witness the benevolent ruler's overthrow by a rival. As the Jesuits were indelibly associated with the fallen leader's regime, successors typically took a dim initial view of the Jesuits (Sundararaj in Amaladass, 1988, pp. 124-125).

Jesuits adapted admirably, adopting a remarkable interdisciplinary approach. During turbulent times of political transition, when their tenuous toehold in Indian society was cast in stark relief, "the contribution of the Jesuits lay in the fields of science and learning rather than in that of direct missionary work" (Neill, 1985, p. 89). In order to remain established within Indian society, Jesuit missionaries contributed to secular advancement when politics prohibited philosophical pursuits. Secular contribution then reopened the door for ideological influence. For example, the Jesuits learned that Jaipur's new Raja (regional despot) held a deep interest in mathematics and astronomy, so Society leaders dispatched two Bavarian Jesuit priests with a strong background in both disciplines to the newly crowned leader's court. Their scientific prowess soon facilitated philosophical discourse with the Raja, which led to his Catholic conversion and munificent patronage of the Society. In short order, the ruler "attended mass regularly with all due reverence, and left generous alms upon the altar" (Neill, 1985, p. 89). Secular inroads thus greatly aided spiritual conversion.

Recognizing the precariousness of any individual local, regional, or national administration, Jesuits strove to maintain a prominent influential foothold in the courts of leaders at all levels in order to mitigate the inevitable perturbations of Indian politics. While Jesuits of varied rank and expertise plied the courts of regional monarchs according to their interests and disposition, the most prominent and adroit Jesuit missionaries became intimately involved in

political proceedings at the national level. Beschi, a leading missionary figure and accomplished linguist, established “an intimate relationship with the Mogul Chieftain Chanda Sahib,” the Indian monarch of greatest contemporary significance who enjoyed sixteenth-century India’s version of national sovereignty (Gnanapragasam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 175). Such political dexterity led Beschi to reputedly become the *diwan*, or chief treasury official in the Mogul’s court; while unconfirmed, this claim is plausible given Beschi’s remarkable influence, which ensured that “the Missionaries and the Catholics were free from the harassment of the [Indian] Muslim soldiers” (Gnanapragasam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 175).

Similarly, in a different political era, national king Thirumala “was highly pleased with the profound knowledge of De Nobili. He granted him a public and official licence [sic] to preach and build churches anywhere he pleased in his Kingdom” (Sundararaj in Amaladass, 1988, p. 123). Political patronage was thus integral to the Jesuits’ prolific proselytizing labors, and Jesuit civic efforts, far more straightforward than shrewd, paved the way for religious conversion of monarchs and masses alike.

A byproduct of Jesuit political penetration was the emergence of the Society’s *de facto* intermediary role between European colonial powers and Indian rulers. Jesuit language skills and collegial familiarity with feudal lords of all ranks encouraged Portuguese and other European commercial and political interests to seek Jesuit representation in Indian courts. Similarly, Indian leaders came to rely on Jesuit mediation with the Europeans. Jesuit diplomacy “went a long way towards strengthening the colonial hold even in regions where the political-military jurisdiction of the Portuguese was not effective. It was not without reasons that the missionaries were often functioning officially as political diplomatic agents for the Portuguese” (de Souza in Amaladass, 1988, p. 39).

The reverse was true as well—Jesuits also advocated Indian interests, often in official capacity (Neill, 1985). Xavier established a “commanding influence with the indigenous rulers,” and was “much sought after by the native

rulers in winning the protection and support of the Portuguese” (Sundararaj in Amaladass, 1988, p. 118). Consequently, the Society gained an admirable reputation as an impartial third party to negotiations, beneficial to both sides but beholden to neither. European and Indian elements alike had compelling financial and practical reasons for lending support to Jesuit missions, and the Society’s stature and reputation prospered in both circles. In fact, the Jesuits became so prominent as to eventually appear threatening to European, particularly Portuguese, interests and aspirations. As a result, in 1739, fearful European powers began to conspire to suppress the Jesuits (Neill, 1985, Ch. 6). Nevertheless, Jesuit political adroitness allowed nearly two centuries of robust support from European and Indian sources alike.

If the realities of the Indian political scene permitted a straightforward (though unavoidably hazardous and halting) Jesuit approach, the caste system was perpetual peril for missionary aims. Xavier and every subsequent Society member recognized that Hindu faith and Indian caste traditions were inextricably linked, as an individual’s lot in this iteration of human existence was, in Hindu teaching, a direct and unalterable result of his previous spiritual attainment. Revision of one philosophy inexorably required penetration and modification of both. Caste proved to be the Jesuits’ most resilient frustration, as well as the backdrop for their most daring and courageous conversion endeavors.

Ironically, caste disparities provided the first avenues of approach to Indian ideological conversion. Indian rulers of the *Kshatriya* class had no concern for the faith or ideology of their pariah constituents, and were thus entirely indifferent to Jesuit efforts to convert the lower castes to Catholicism (Sundararaj in Amaladass, 1988, p. 118). While Catholic tradition exalts the weak, weary and poor, the Jesuits quickly realized that their satisfying work among the lower castes was effective but self-limiting. Without endorsement by the upper classes, Catholicism would be relegated to a fringe role in Indian



society (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 327). Unfortunately, priests who ministered to the pariahs could not so much as gain audience with members of higher castes.

Jesuits adapted through specialization and subterfuge. Cross-class ministry was infeasible, as “it [was] impossible for the low castes and the high castes to be united in a place of worship; not even in a private house [could] they be together” (Fr. Andrew Lopez, quoted by Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 328). Because differing classes dressed, spoke, labored, ate, drank, and socialized in vastly unlike ways, Jesuits recognized the need for individual priests to take on the characteristics of an assigned caste. This they pursued with vigor.

De Nobili, the distinguished Indian linguist, is perhaps the greatest example of personal transformation to accommodate caste tradition in an effort to achieve religious and ideological influence. Indian religious teachers and philosophers, or *Brahmin*, were the most esteemed caste, and De Nobili recognized that caste influence required caste membership. He set out to become a Brahmin, which required a “*kenosis*, a complete emptying of all nationality, culture and personal convenience” (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 306):

In rigor and austerity of life [Brahmin] rival the greatest penitents in the world. That meant in addition to their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, an absolute abstinence from meat, fish, eggs, wine, etc. It meant daily fast and only one meal at 4 p.m.; it meant giving up chairs, cots, shoes, hat, traveling on horseback, etc. It meant even cutting oneself off from his own brethren with regard to food, and to this end Nobili took a Brahmin with him to cook his meal whether he went to Cochin to see his Provincial or to the Council of Goa.

(Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 305).

De Nobili separated himself from his Jesuit peers in order not to appear defiled by contact with lower classes, going so far as to construct separate missions for Jesuits who specialized in ministry to individual castes. The

colossal effort and personal sacrifice was worthwhile. “[Brahmin] status was more respected than that of the king. [De Nobili] could now speak with great authority as an *Acharya* or Master of Christian Law to Brahmins and other leaders of Hindu society” (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 306).

Attaining *Brahmin Sanyasi*, or the status of a religious teacher, was only the first half of the struggle; to avoid alienating his Indian equals, De Nobili had to apply his newfound influence judiciously and skillfully. He leveraged his “extraordinary knowledge of Sanskrit and Indian poetry” to gain philosophical audience with other *Brahmin*, then “gradually showed the agreement between Brahmin and Christian teaching. He did not condemn or show contempt for Brahmin beliefs, but pointed out that Christianity was only a more perfect form of religion. Hence it became possible for Brahmins to become Christians in belief without alienating themselves from the traditional forms of Indian society” (Fulop-Miller in Duignan, 1958, p. 727). De Nobili’s contemporaries adopted a similar tack in their respective assigned castes, ensuring that conversion did not require individuals to renounce their culture.

Those Jesuits who comported themselves as members of the higher classes did not abdicate Catholic notions of individual equality under God. Rather, they exposed themselves to great risk by ministering to the lower castes surreptitiously: “[De Nobili], being a Brahmin Sanyasi, was forbidden to have any intercourse with the low castes but he took the risk, [and] baptized the Paranghi” (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 327). While Jesuit efforts resulted in large numbers of pariah converts, the Society’s secret lower-class dealings were inevitably revealed. In one instance, furious Indians demolished a Jesuit church and arrested dozens of priests and converts on charges of caste violations (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 322).

Jesuit conformity with the caste system did not preclude concerted attempts to change class traditions. While Jesuits viewed class prejudices as abhorrent, they quickly learned that drastic change in this area was impossible: “[Jesuits] made many attempts to remove this odd...line of demarcation between

the higher and lower castes but they were followed by immediate strong reactions” (Rajamanickam in Amaladass, 1988, p. 329). Similarly, Jesuits were outspoken about the inhumane treatment of women, providing shelters for widows who avoided *sati* (Nirmal in Amaladass, 1988, p. 44). Though it is impossible to know whether Jesuit influence was just one voice among many (and material changes to Indian society were due as much to changes in leadership as anything else), or whether Jesuit influence was in fact formative, Indian society gradually and eventually migrated away from such controversial practices (Nirmal in Amaladass, 1988, pp. 45-47). Either way, Jesuits worked to change the system from within, one individual at a time.

It would be grossly inaccurate to represent India’s social change as one-sided. While Jesuit influence on Indian culture was profound, missionaries painstakingly assimilated the “customs and habits of the people of the soil” (Velinkar in Amaladass, 1988, p. 72). Rather than sanctimoniously and rigidly presenting indelible, dogmatic truths, as did their Franciscan and Dominican contemporaries, “the Jesuits adapted their way of life to the genius and character of the people” (Velinkar in Amaladass, 1988, p. 74). Compromise was inevitable, as “the obstacles to this adaptation were the articles of the Christian faith and the moral law, laws of the Church and norms of the Society of Jesus” (Velinkar in Amaladass, 1988, p. 74). Jesuits chose their ideological battles carefully, reserving cultural contention for central Catholic truths while acquiescing readily to inconsequential elements of form: “Many local customs were preserved or adapted, such as the blessing of the new crop, the ceremonial procession with the first sheaves to the village church, throwing of rice grains on the newly married couple, blessing of a new house before occupation, etc” (Velinkar in Amaladass, 1988, p. 75). Jesuit missionaries did not require renunciation of the essence of Indian culture in order to embrace Christianity, but “through study tried to discover elements in Indian life common to Christianity, so that they might build bridges between the two ways of life” (Duignan, 1958, p. 728).

## **B. LESSONS FROM INDIA**

The Society's amazing accomplishments in India arose from simple yet profound techniques of influence. Jesuits established nearly permanent individual presence in India, permitting long-term rapport with Indian citizens. Missionaries mastered local languages, enabling intelligent and effective practical and ideological discourse. Jesuits also gained audience, and eventually influence, with the pertinent political leadership throughout India, garnering favor and endorsement for their missions from both Indian and European powers. Though they despised the injustices of the caste system, Jesuits adopted class practices to gain acceptance within each discrete division, even as they worked diligently to change social norms. Their caste efforts enabled them to convince many Indian religious teachers that embracing Catholicism was not an abandonment of Hindu philosophy, but a natural extension and completion of the Hindu search for truth. Finally, Jesuit missionaries accommodated Indian traditions, even though a compliant approach guaranteed that Catholicism's Indian incarnation would differ significantly from Rome's stringent prescriptions. Rather than despair at the disparities, Jesuits confidently but carefully asserted the fundamental elements of Catholicism, and readily compromised on marginal issues. Jesuit missionaries demonstrated the humility and diligence to adapt personally and profoundly to their adopted culture, and exerted their hard-won influence with patience, restraint, and judgment.

### III. CHINA

Xenophobic, insular, and massive, China proved a formidable challenge to Jesuit missionary efforts. While Chinese society lacked the stringency of India's caste system and the truculence of feudal Japan, the Chinese felt fervently that everything of worth originated and remained within the Middle Kingdom. Led by Matteo Ricci, Valignano's appointee to direct Jesuit efforts in China, Jesuit missionaries met a nearly impenetrable civilization, physically and ideologically, upon their arrival in 1583 (Duignan, 1958, p. 727). Ricci and his counterparts were dismayed to discover that "the Chinese look at all foreigners as illiterate and barbarous, and refer to them in these terms. They disdain to learn anything from the books of outsiders because they believe that all true science and knowledge belongs to them alone" (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 89). Ideological conversion would clearly be an uphill struggle.

Chinese culture included fundamental elements of tradition and isolation, guarded jealously against foreign corruption by officials of all ranks. As Ricci noted regarding Chinese resistance to outside influence, "the Chinese will not permit a foreigner to live at large within the confines of the kingdom if he has any intention of ever leaving it or if he has any communication with the outside world" (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 58). Even the highly resourceful Portuguese traders, seemingly ubiquitous in other Eastern lands, were relegated to the peripheral and largely inconsequential coastal territory of Macao (Allan, 1975, p. 23). The Chinese granted such meager accommodation to Europe's most prolific Asian trading empire with great reluctance and at ruinous rents, and gladly sacrificed commercial efficiency for cultural seclusion (Allan, 1975, p. 23). China possessed an extremely well developed sense of self, which she strove forcefully to insulate from external infection.

Such uniform and pervasive exclusivity suggests a central ideological and political apparatus, which was indeed the case in China. Unlike Japan and India, the China with which European Jesuits interacted was a mature and consolidated

political entity with clear lines of authority. Though regional and local variations abounded, they were clearly of the minor variety. Competing regional rulers submitted to arbitration by their superiors long before they considered violence: “Neither the King nor his people ever think of waging a war of aggression. They are quite different from the people of Europe, who are frequently discontent with their own governments and covetous of other people” (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 55).

Though hierarchical and centralized, politics in China were no less capricious than in Japan or India. As Ricci notes, “There are no ancient laws in China under which the republic is governed in perpetuum [sic], such as our laws of the twelve tables and the Code of Caesar. Whoever succeeds in getting the possession of the throne, regardless of his ancestry, makes new laws according to his own way of thinking” (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 43). Additionally, centralized ideology required regional implementation, which meant that the Jesuits faced a situation similar to that in feudal Japan and India: political influence must first be proximately effective.

While China’s political affairs turned violent far less often than in India or Japan, the Chinese did not share Catholicism’s regard for the sanctity of human life. As female children imposed a significant financial burden at the time of their marriage, and were otherwise unable to contribute much beyond labor to the family’s station, parents often drowned their female infants (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 86). Ricci also despaired to learn that parents frequently sold their children into slavery, clearly against Catholic notions of the sanctuary of the home (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 86). Suicide was also common, motivated by “desperation of earning a living, or in utter despair because of misfortune, or out of spite for an enemy” (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 87). While Chinese nonchalance regarding human existence was not unique in that part of the world, it was nevertheless troublesome from the Catholic perspective.

The Chinese view of human life reflected their philosophy. Though tradition and superstition dominated Chinese consciousness, there was little

recognizable commonality between Chinese values and European notions of religion. As Ricci laments, “Most of [the Chinese] utterly admit that they have no religion, and...generally fall into the deepest depths of utter atheism” (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 105). Most believed in a Karma-like reckoning of behavior, though in a temporal context. Punishment for evil and reward for good was commonly held to extend only to the limits of human life; the sins of the father might be visited upon his son, but only while both were alive (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 94). The conceptual underpinnings for Catholicism’s fundamental elements—the existence of a benevolent omniscience, the separation of human soul and body, the transcendence of life beyond physical death, and the eternal existence of heaven, hell, and the human soul—were entirely alien in China (Ricci, Allan, Spence). As in Japan, there were no Chinese words to describe such ideas.

The Chinese esteemed erudition above all else. In India, the philosopher/teacher caste outranked the ruling class; in China, philosophers *were* the ruling class, as “the entire Kingdom is administered by the Order of the Learned, commonly known as the Philosophers [or Mandarins]. The responsibility for orderly management of the entire realm is wholly and completely committed to their charge and care” (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 55). Reason and scholarship were the most effective political capital. Fortunately, the Jesuits had both in spades; unfortunately, the fiercely insular political construct made access to influential leaders a near impossibility. As in other Eastern lands, the Jesuits faced an extremely difficult task in China.

## **A. JESUIT EFFORTS AND RESULTS**

“The most brilliant group of Jesuits were [sic] those who labored to convert China” (Duignan, 1958, p. 727). The Chinese were far from welcoming, and the Jesuits were almost driven from their tenuous beachhead at Macao on numerous occasions after their arrival in 1583 (Duignan, 1958). Under the direction of Matteo Ricci and his successors, the Jesuits patiently and painstakingly gained Chinese access, acceptance, influence, and ultimately conversion. It took 18

years for the Jesuits to gain access to Peking, but they quickly developed a church with over 200 converts within the capitol city (Allan, 1975, p. 60). Progress was unsteady, but the Jesuits amassed a Catholic congregation of over 150,000 by 1652; ten years later, the number had nearly doubled (Allan, 1975, p. 146). As in Japan and India, Jesuit missionaries attained impressive results under austere circumstances.

The first difficulty was one of access. Jesuits accompanied Portuguese traders to Macao, a Chinese protectorate outside China proper, but initially found further penetration problematic. It became immediately clear that access required influence, so Ricci “at once took up the study of Chinese, giving attention to the vernacular, at the same time making himself acquainted with the classical literature” (Allan, 1975, p. 27). Through study of the language, Ricci became acquainted with important elements of Chinese culture, and came to appreciate the revered role of scholarship in Chinese society. Over time, Ricci’s impressive European education and admirable Chinese language skills gained the notice of the local viceroy in Macao, who granted audience to the Jesuits. Ricci and his associates won the viceroy’s favor through appropriate gifts and assurance that their purposes in China were to “worship God, cultivate the sciences and learn from the Chinese” (Allan, 1975, p. 29). In return, the viceroy granted access to the mainland.

While Ricci and his team had acquired significant language skills during their lengthy Macao layover, they also adopted a somewhat flawed view of Chinese values during their internment in the isolated semi-European protectorate. Initially, the Jesuits dressed like Buddhist monks in order to foster respect and influence; they quickly realized that on the mainland, however, Buddhists only infinitesimally outranked foreigners on the social ladder. After adjusting their appearance to more closely resemble China’s literati, the revered scholars, Jesuit missionaries enjoyed far more rapid social advancement (Spence, 1984, pp. 115-116). Each social encounter furthered Ricci’s understanding of acceptable Chinese behavior and appearance, and the Jesuits



doggedly adopted local customs: “In our clothing, in our looks, in our manners and in everything external we have made ourselves Chinese” (Ricci in Spence, 1984, p. 114).

Jesuit assumption of Chinese customs in speech and appearance softened the missionaries’ otherwise stark foreignness, and provided opportunity to interact with the Chinese on a more equal basis. Jesuits leveraged their significant scientific expertise to elevate their status and pave the way for ideological influence. Ricci filled Society residences with scientific curiosities, fairly common European items to which the Chinese had never before been exposed, which generated significant interest among the missionaries’ Chinese guests. The Jesuits interspersed religious artifacts among the technical items, which provided a natural segue between scientific and religious discussion, though Jesuits were careful not to jeopardize their newfound esteem by proselytizing prematurely: “The missionaries did not directly carry on a religious propaganda, but contented themselves with receiving guests and allowing the scrolls and inscriptions that were hung on the walls of the room to speak for themselves” (Allan, 1975, p. 32). As word of the Jesuits’ miraculous scientific wonders spread, the missionaries gained in popularity and regard. Influence followed shortly.

As Ricci intended, Jesuit knowledge of the sciences quickly came to the attention of city and regional rulers, who were left agape by the missionaries’ rational explanation of physical phenomena. Just as in India and Japan, Society missionaries used their extensive education to great advantage to secure considerable patronage. Presenting gifts of triangular glass prisms, illustrated scientific volumes, maps, and elaborately decorated novelties such as a statue of the Virgin Mary, missionaries gained the favor and support of the governor of Sciauquin (or Xiaoquin), who was sufficiently moved to provide land and supplies for a church and mission (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, pp. 147-151). Similar tactics employed throughout the southern region of China soon earned the Jesuits nearly universal respect. Ricci’s team enlightened China’s elite; Jesuit

knowledge of Chinese language and culture allowed them to communicate Europe's advanced understanding of the planets—beginning with the basics, such as the existence of the earth, moon, and sun as discrete (and round, rather than flat) physical bodies moving in relation to each other—to win the trust and admiration of China's upper crust (Gallagher, 1953, pp. 325-332).

Society missionaries showcased their scientific talents in order to secure a foothold in Chinese society, as “[Jesuit] education and attainments profoundly impressed the scholars, and [missionaries] were made secure from indignity and trouble” (Allan, 1975, p. 32). Over time, the Chinese came to respect Jesuit intellectual capacity as far more than a novelty, and regional and national rulers sought Jesuit participation in matters of political importance. French Jesuits co-authored the Nerchinsk Treaty ending border disputes between Russia and China (Allan, 1975, p. 212). John Adam Schaal, a German Jesuit, became the young Emperor Shun Chih's personal tutor, and remained Chih's close advisor upon his imperial succession (Allan, 1975, p. 144). Subsequent Jesuits held a similar royal advisory post, exercising unprecedented foreign influence in China's highest court (Allan, 1975, p. 177). Education and astute cultural observation garnered political clout, which Jesuit missionaries utilized to gain ideological influence.

In addition to sway earned among the political elite, Jesuits gained public favor through their sensitivity to Chinese superstition and ritual. Rather than beginning construction on a church as planned, during an “unlucky” month, Jesuits waited for an “auspicious” day to break ground. This gesture gained such approbation that many Chinese volunteered to aid in constructing the church (Ricci in Gallagher, 1953, p. 152). Controversially, Jesuits permitted Chinese converts to maintain their traditional ancestral tribute rituals; while extremely contentious among the Catholic hierarchy in the Inquisition era, Ricci viewed the ceremonies as “purely civil and political” rather than as a manifestation of religious blasphemy (Allan, 1975, p. 167). Ricci and his successors understood the rites to be integral to Chinese culture, and strove to present Christianity as an

extension and perfection of Chinese thought rather than as a replacement for long-held social customs. Similarly, Jesuits understood the deep distaste among the Chinese for crucifixion, a method of death reserved only for the most dishonorable and despicable of criminals; consequently and with equal controversy, Jesuits refrained from displaying the Catholic crucifix, as it would have been an untenably poor symbol under which to attempt religious conversion in China (Duignan, 1958, p. 728). Such accommodation of inherent Chinese identity facilitated effective and efficient ideological influence, evidenced by the striking numbers of Chinese Christian converts won by the Jesuits.

Despite unparalleled Jesuit success and consequent Catholic expansion in China, Catholic orthodoxy and Society accommodation inevitably clashed. With ringing endorsement from hard-line Franciscan and Dominican missionary orders, Pope Clement XI dispatched Charles-Thomas Maillard De Tournon in 1704 as Papal Legate to China with explicit instructions to proscribe ancestry rituals, and to prohibit the use of two specific Chinese words with peripheral Confucian and secular contexts to represent the Christian God (Allan, 1975, pp. 232-234). This had the catastrophic effect of appearing to Emperor K'ang Hsi as an assault on China's sovereignty by the Roman pope (Allan, 1975, p. 239). In 1707, Hsi angrily terminated his Jesuit patronage due to their symbolic link to an imperious Rome, and subsequent years saw marked polarization between Rome, the Jesuits, and the Chinese (Allan, 1975, p. 239). Fearing further invasive European political intervention, Hsi's successor Yung Cheng outlawed Christianity in China in 1722 (Allan, 1975, pp. 261-265). Though Cheng's objections to Catholic proselytizing were undeniably political rather than ideological, his repression efforts were bloody and brutal, and Christianity had all but been eradicated by the time of his death in 1735 (Allan, 1975, p. 273). Papal hubris and absolutism erased over 150 years of Jesuit progress in China.

## **B. LESSONS FROM CHINA**

Valignano's vision of a patient, compliant approach to instilling and spreading Catholic values in foreign cultures found marvelous application in

China under Ricci's astute direction. China's Jesuits painstakingly learned the interplay between Chinese language and culture, determined the salient points of interconnected cultural value, and utilized their strengths to gain personal, political, and ideological influence. Just as in India and Japan, China's Society missionaries advanced Christianity as an extension and completion of longstanding social mores and traditions, removing the need for Chinese converts to renounce their heritage and culture for Catholicism. Before Christianity's ignominious end in China, Jesuits gained unprecedented sway in a legendarily insular civilization through determined social adaptation and accommodation.

## IV. JAPAN

The Jesuits ventured far afield, leveraging Portugal's vast trade empire to gain access to what would come to be known as the Land of the Rising Sun. At the tedious and treacherous journey's end, Jesuits discovered a thorny collection of apparent contradictions embodied in Japan's culture. Collectively bellicose but personally docile, polytheistic and animistic yet strongly secular, struggling to shed feudalism for monarchy, and capable of unspeakable atrocity for honor's sake, Japanese society conspired to confound Jesuit missionary efforts.

Japan's political situation was perhaps even more unsettled and belligerent than India's. When the Jesuits arrived in 1549, the country's leadership was extremely fragmented and fractious; by 1573, Oda Nobunaga had conquered half of Japan, though in a largely titular fashion (Moran, 1993, p. 5). Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Nobunaga's successor, united the rest of the country beginning in 1581 (Moran, 1993, p. 5). While political consolidation during the Jesuit period evolved into robust application, Hideyoshi held in many corners of Japan a "distant and nebulous authority, which the emperor himself had no means of enforcing, but those who did wield [regional] power would from time to time claim that they ruled as instruments of the imperial will" (Moran, 1993, p. 4). Of dubious background, Hideyoshi was not able to receive the official title of Shogun from the emperor, a difficulty that strengthened his resolve but weakened his position considerably. Despite Nobunaga and Hideyoshi's ostensible unification, Japan remained a hybrid monarchical-feudal society for many years, and "local daimyo, hereditary military lords, often acknowledged no authority above their own, and desperate struggles for power and territory were common" (Moran, 1993, p. 5). Tokugawa Ieyasu, Hideyoshi's successor, achieved substantially more far-reaching control over the distant reaches of Japanese territory, but the process was somewhat halting, and centralization of Japanese power in the seat of the Shogunate still required often-tenuous

regional administration. Though Japan seemed to march inexorably toward unification, the process was tumultuous, complex, and inconsistent.

While Japan was not bound by a caste system such as India's, "Japanese society was divided into the watertight divisions of samurai, peasants, craftsmen and traders" (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 214). In Japanese culture, "the authority of the [feudal] lord was absolute, his will was law, and his jurisdiction did not stop short at the borders of an independent spiritual order" (Moran, 1993, p. 67). Japanese masses held the nobility in near-deity esteem, and the pugnacious feudal environment within which the numerous nobles struggled for influence placed the common Japanese citizen in a difficult situation: subjects could either fight for their proximate noble, or face execution at his hands (Moran, 1993, p. 34). No small number of conflicts arose, with plenty of willing participants given the unsavory alternative, and many Europeans consequently believed the Japanese to be "very cruel and quick to kill" (Moran, 1993, p. 33).

European commercial influence also fomented further friction in Japan. For years, the Portuguese dominated trade with Japan, an arrangement met with varying degrees of feudal lord support. Japanese leaders vacillated between embracing the economic advantages attendant to European trade, and bristling at perceived colonial overtures. The Portuguese understood that due to the bellicose feudal construct, frequent treasons, and relatively few resources, conquering Japan would be a bloody and unprofitable undertaking (Moran, 1993, pp. 49-50). While the Portuguese were convinced that "the Japanese were too proud and too clever ever to allow themselves to be ruled by foreigners" (Moran 1993, p. 54), the Spanish took a noticeably more colonial than commercial tack upon their arrival in the mid-1500s (Moran, 1993, p. 2). The effect was polarizing, both between European powers and among their often-reluctant Japanese hosts.

For the Jesuits, who were largely Italian and Portuguese, the arrival of the Spanish trade and missionary parties was a harbinger of hardship. The Spanish presence forced direct Jesuit dealings with members of the hard-line and

adamant Franciscan and Dominican missionary orders, who were largely of Spanish descent (Moran, 1993, p. 2). The Dominicans were particularly notorious as overt instruments of Spanish conquest, approaching conversion as a byproduct of domination rather than as the outcome of patient ideological influence (Ross in O'Malley et al, 1999, p. 338). Heavy-handed missionary tactics were bound to cause difficulty for the more accommodating Jesuits.

More importantly, the perception of political benignity the Portuguese worked diligently to foster among the Japanese was shattered by the arrival of the far more ambitious and colonial Spanish interests. Spain was "a country of conquest, and this became known early to the Japanese and Chinese authorities" (Ross in O'Malley et al, 1999, p. 346). Spain's rapacious reputation, combined with draconian Dominican tactics, convinced Hideyoshi that "the real aim of the missionaries in making Christians is nothing less than to hand over Japan to the king of Spain" (Moran, 1993, pp. 80-81). Many regional lords viewed the Spanish arrival with similar cynicism.

While Jesuits decried the "indiscreet fervour of the [Spanish] friars" (Moran, 1993, p. 81), and "wished there to be no association between the work of the Society...and Spain" (Ross in O'Malley et al, 1999, p. 346), Society missionaries were unsuccessful in their attempts to divorce themselves from Spain's significant stigma. Japanese political leaders often declared the Jesuits guilty of expansionist ambition by reason of European association. As in India, Jesuits were forced to overcome an unsavory European reputation; unlike the Jesuit experience in India, many Japanese rulers responded swiftly, vigorously, and violently to perceived threats to their power. So sensitive was the political situation that "any challenge, any evidence of independent power or authority, risked a crushing response" (Moran, 1993, p. 71).

Japan's religious customs posed another profound (though decidedly less dangerous) obstacle to Jesuit missionary labors. Polytheistic and animistic Buddhist and Shinto traditions clashed with Catholic monotheism, and Japanese religious customs were permissive, ambiguous, unwritten, and largely free-form,

the precise opposite of Rome's rigidity: "To the majority of Japanese the strictness and intolerance of the Roman Catholic Church in the East must have been incomprehensible, for as a race they are singularly indifferent in religious matters" (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 43). Further, the Japanese believed in *kami*, sacred spiritual powers endemic to ancestors, elements, animals, and inert objects, and Japanese nobility approached *kami* status in the eyes of their subjects (Moran, 1993, p. 77). Thus, any attempt to undermine feudal rulers as ultimate moral authorities strained the fabric of Japanese society. Additionally, ruling classes often held significantly different religious beliefs than their subjects (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 218). As a consequence of the strong political overtones to Japanese religion, as well as the alien Japanese philosophical and religious mores, Jesuits faced a knotty religious scene.

A practical obstruction also arose. Jesuits in Japan received irregular financial support from Europe, exacerbated by the arduous and dangerous thirty-month sea journey between the two continents (Moran, 1993, p. 42). Frequent seafaring mishaps and unfavorable winds jeopardized Jesuit solvency; for example, a 1609 catastrophe sunk the merchant ship *Madre de Deus*, and "two years' supplies for the Jesuit mission in Japan were lost" (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 61). Rome's rigid priesthood rules proscribed commercial activity (ironically, except in Rome itself), denying Jesuit access to a ready practical financial solution (Moran, 1993, p. 117). Thus, fiscal difficulties added to the prohibitive cultural, linguistic, political, and religious complexities Society missionaries encountered in Japan.

#### **A. JESUIT EFFORTS AND THE JAPANESE OUTCOME**

The turbulent "Christian Century" in Japan ended unfavorably in 1640, and along with Japanese monarchs' concomitant subjugation of Buddhism, Chinese philosophy came to dominate Japan's ideological landscape (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 214). Japanese rulers isolated the country from foreign influence, and systematically suppressed Christians and Buddhists "for political and not religious reasons, just as they moved against any political or military power"



(Moran, 1993, p. 70). The religious purge was caustic and bloody, with casualty estimates as high as 40,000 (Kentaro). Even though Japan's despots "did not fear that their arbitrary authority would be replaced by a regime shaped by a Christian conception of the world and of life," and they instead conceived that their rule might be "replaced by someone else's arbitrary authority" (Moran, 1993, p. 113), the outcome for religious aspirants of all creeds was ominous and bloody. Nevertheless, the Jesuit contribution to Christianity's "meteoric rise" prior to Japan's institutional injunction was profound and prolific (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 214).

By 1587, 38 years after the Society's arrival in Japan, the Jesuits had gained over 300,000 Japanese converts, with over 100,000 in Kyushu alone (Moran, 1993, p. 64). As in India, numerous Jesuit schools "turned out yearly a large number of graduates imbued with European ideas and outlook, whose influence upon their fellow countrymen can scarcely have been negligible" (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 134). Unlike in India, where the stifling rigidity of the caste system prevented the production of Indian Jesuit priests, many Japanese Jesuits emerged from the Society's lengthy priesthood education; this feat is more remarkable given Rome's dogmatic insistence on the exclusive use of Latin in Catholic religious rites, requiring Japanese trainees to gain an in-depth knowledge of the already-arcane language (Moran, 1993, p. 162). The Jesuit mission to Japan "was numerically the most successful mission to an already literate people that the church has witnessed since the first six centuries of the Christian era" (Ross in O'Malley et al, 1999, p. 337).

Alessandro Valignano, the chief Jesuit in the Far East until his death in 1610, was the architect of the Society's success in Japan. Valignano disparaged the Franciscan and Dominican approach as "ruling with severity and not love" (Ross in O'Malley et al, 1999, p. 340), and urged a respectful and accommodating Jesuit approach: "with respect to clothing, diet, style of housing, habits of bathing, and conformity to the incredibly elaborate patterns of Japanese etiquette, Valignano thrust the European Jesuits and the church that grew about

them deep into Japanese ways” (Ross in O’Malley et al, 1999, p. 344). Valignano fervently believed that “Europeans must bear in mind that it is they who have to learn the Japanese customs, not the Japanese who have to learn theirs” (Moran, 1993, p. 53). Francis Xavier, Japan’s chief Jesuit and Valignano’s subordinate, similarly understood that the Society could “earn the respect of the Japanese, and succeed in what they were trying to do, only if they learned to accommodate themselves to the Japanese way of doing things” (Moran, 1993, p. 54).

Jesuit efforts necessarily began by gaining proficiency in Japan’s single language. Unfortunately, a significant error undermined early Jesuit linguistic efforts, as Xavier began translation work in earnest before gaining a thorough understanding of the inherent cultural intricacies interwoven in the Japanese language. Xavier regrettably followed a Japanese intellectual’s recommendations for appropriate Japanese language equivalents to important words in Catholic theology, not realizing that Japanese culture had no accompanying conceptual counterparts. The result was a highly stilted and unnatural construction wherein words describing, “such concepts as God, Saviour, and sacraments were unhelpful when not hopelessly misguided” (Ross in O’Malley et al, 1999, p. 342). Xavier aggravated the difficulty when he “decided to replace the mistaken terms in Japanese translations by Japanese versions of Latin words” (Ross in O’Malley et al, 1999, pp. 342-343). Consequently, the Japanese had difficulty comprehending entirely foreign words describing thoroughly alien concepts.

Fortunately, Jesuit persistence and adaptation eventually overcame the inauspicious linguistic beginning, and Society missionaries rapidly gained sufficient expertise to publish a large number of literary works in Japanese. Valignano arranged for the delivery of a printing press, which arrived in 1590; Jesuits soon modified the press to contain Japanese characters as well, which permitted prolific distribution of missionary tracts (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p.

125). Jesuits also introduced copper plate engraving, which together with the printing press allowed the Society to reach and influence an extensive audience (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 125).

Language proficiency permitted Jesuit political interaction as well, a necessity in Japan's turbulent and dangerous society. Valignano and Xavier's strategy "was always to cultivate and if possible convert the powerful and the prominent, and then to use their power, fame and influence to promote Christianity" (Moran, 1993, p. 189). Just as in India, Jesuits recognized the requirement to obtain the support of the nobility, tacit or active. While Jesuits failed to gain substantial traction in the imperial courts of Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, which contributed in no small measure to Christianity's persecution and eventual extermination in Japan, Society missionaries successfully recruited the support of a number of powerful regional rulers. Feudal patronage permitted wide latitude within the realms of sympathetic lords, and facilitated far more rapid Catholic expansion than would have otherwise been possible.

While Jesuits successfully converted noblemen to Christianity in many instances, conversion was not a prerequisite for patronage. Many rulers stopped shy of Catholic conversion, yet greatly aided Society aims. A powerful provincial lord named Tadaoki was perhaps the greatest example of non-proselyte political patronage, providing years of protection and assistance. Tadaoki formed a lasting friendship with a learned Jesuit missionary sent to his court; while he never embraced Christianity, Tadaoki defended Jesuit interests against Buddhist conspirators (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 236), and refused to enforce Hideyoshi's anti-Christian edict (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 226). Though anti-religious fervor eventually gained considerable momentum, and "circumstances thus forced Tadaoki to give up his open patronage of the Christians, he still forbore to join the ranks of the persecutors" (Boxer in Moscato, 1979, p. 243). The Society's ability to garner pockets of protection and support permitted continued missionary activity during periods of otherwise prohibitive persecution.

Jesuit missionaries also strove to demonstrate significant social contribution, in order to gain access to Japanese society and mitigate maltreatment during times of turmoil. Jesuits established Japan's first known hospital, enabled the spread of literacy through their printing efforts, expanded Japanese technical and logical understanding with European knowledge of the natural sciences, founded numerous schools, fed and sheltered the poor, and used each accompanying inroad to influence various segments of Japanese culture (Boxer, 1979; Moran, 1993; Ross, 1999). Just as in India, Society members profited from their extensive education and experience, and the Japanese benefited handsomely from Jesuit labors in turn. Jesuits leveraged their unique skills to garner favor and tolerance, and to subsequently exert effective philosophical sway.

Jesuit alacrity and adaptation were not unidirectional. Despite Rome's vehement if somewhat duplicitous objections, the Society's severe financial difficulties prompted Valignano to authorize Jesuit participation in lucrative commercial trade between Japan and Europe (Moran, 1993; Boxer, 1979). Though Xavier and Valignano received scathing reproaches from various quarters within the priesthood, they "did not accept the criticism, did not cease trading, and told [Jesuit leadership in Rome] in 1603 that the trade would be necessary until such time as the [Japanese Shogun], and other great lords, were converted and able to support and provide for Christianity" (Moran, 1993, p. 117). Valignano was well aware that "In Europe the idea of religious poverty and humility was respected, but at the same time the [European Catholic] bishops and other prelates, who were dignitaries if not princes themselves, had the status, the authority, and often the wealth to deal with princes or other secular dignitaries" (Moran, 1993, p. 105). He dismissed the Vatican's criticism of Jesuit commercial enterprise outright. Valignano's fortitude and foresight permitted the Society to remain solvent in Japan when European support languished in indifference or sank in rough seas.

## **B. LESSONS FROM JAPAN**

Jesuit methodology permitted unprecedented proselytizing success in a belligerent, incongruent civilization. Valignano and other Society leaders guided a culturally compliant approach that permitted conversion without renunciation of one's Japanese heritage, provided significant intrinsic ideological incentive, imported profound scientific and intellectual advancements, and portrayed Christianity as the completion of traditional Japanese ideology's search for truth. At the center of Valignano's concept and Xavier's implementation was a markedly accommodative method by which Jesuit missionaries gained acceptance, reverence, and influence through humble self-transformation that enabled Society members to meet Japanese peasants and lords on their own cultural and ideological turf. Absent the air of arrogant supremacy endemic to contemporary Catholic ideologues and their recruitment arms, Jesuits gained far greater traction and attained measurably more estimable ideological results than their more militant counterparts. While in the end, Japan remained determinedly and decidedly Eastern in its religious and philosophical proclivities, Japanese national leaders suppressed Jesuit and other religious authorities on solely secular grounds. In the meantime, Jesuits attained unequalled influence in Japan in lasting, transformative, and far-reaching ways.

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## V. MEANS, ENDS, AND ENDINGS

Any discussion of Jesuit methodology during this period must address the Society's suppression by papal edict in 1773. If a pope saw fit on the ostensible grounds of methodological indiscretion to terminate such a successful missionary arm of the Catholic Church, responsible for the better part of one million converts, how can Jesuit methods be exemplary? While the Society of Jesus was reinstated just over forty years later, again by papal bull, the question remains valid. As in most things, there is more to the story than just the official answer.

As Neill remarks, "the Society of Jesus has never been popular—the unpopularity is perhaps an unwilling tribute to its merits," and the elite of the Catholic church "have tended to look with less than favour on men who...have been inclined to adopt an attitude of considerable independence in relation to the local ordinaries" (Neill, 1985, p. 121). Despite their unwavering loyalty to the pope, Jesuits exercised considerable latitude in the field. Simultaneously, regardless of longstanding Catholic tradition of assimilation and inclusion for political as well as religious aims, Rome became increasingly disinclined to accommodate different religious rituals. The Vatican grew to be "more rigorous in its demands for orthodoxy and less flexible in its dealings with non-Christians" (Duignan, 1958, p. 725). Martin Luther, Jean Cauvin (Calvin), the Reformation and Rome's legalistic response, and the Portuguese Inquisition influenced the church to become "even more unyielding" (Duignan, 1958, p. 725). Heresy was often a capital offense, and Rome's legates wielded divine life-and-death authority. In such an environment, Jesuit accommodation and Rome's rising rigidity were hardly compatible.

Unorthodoxy and doctrinal deviation were an internal threat to Catholicism that motivated a strong Vatican response. However, Rome was also an international political power, engaged in a continuous struggle to preserve its authority *vis a vis* European monarchies. The Society of Jesus unintentionally affronted the Vatican on this external front as well. While the Society's strong

educational underpinning meant “many of the leaders of society in Europe, and even some among the crowned heads, had been [Jesuit] pupils and were attached by strong feelings of affection to their teachers,” many rulers viewed their neighbor’s tacit tie to the Vatican dimly (Neill, 1985, p. 121). In particular, Portuguese and French rulers bridled at the Society’s growing political and social influence, regarded the pope as a disdainful and detrimental influence in their respective societies, and leveraged the Jesuit tradition of papal loyalty to declare Society members *personae non grata* in their respective regimes (Neill, 1985, pp. 121-122).

Protestantism and Inquisition effects notwithstanding, Jesuit loyalty to the pope was compelling, and Pope Clement XIII publicly and officially defended Jesuit methods in 1765 (Neill, 1985, p. 122). Two factors dramatically diminished the effect of Clement’s normally normative missive: first, dissenting European leaders “made it plain that they regarded themselves as supreme in their own domains, and that they were not prepared to submit to any kind of dictation from the pope;” second, Clement XIII died shortly after issuing his ringing Jesuit approbation (Neill, 1985, pp. 123-124). His successor, Clement XIV, was more inclined to accommodate Jesuit detractors, and was “sufficiently pliable to carry out the known wishes of [the secular powers]” (Neill, 1985, p. 124). After a brief period of semi-sanctioned political suppression within secularizing European countries, the Society received its death sentence from Clement XIV in 1773 (Neill, 1985, p. 124). For the Catholic institution, with its far-reaching personal and political authority in jeopardy, sacrificing the Jesuits seemed an obvious solution. The inquisitorial aura surrounding the Society’s dissolution was icing on the cake.

European political maneuvering aside, Jesuit methods clearly did not conform to Catholicism’s established and endorsed European incarnations. Indian, Japanese, and Chinese manifestations of Catholicism would plainly not earn European sanction, as Jesuit missionaries unabashedly accommodated and assimilated aboriginal mores and practices in their proselytizing approach. This



fact is central both to Society success in the missionary field, and to Rome's reservations regarding Jesuit techniques. For the Vatican, form was substance; for the Jesuits, form was sufficiently adaptable to permit meaningful inculcation of substance.

#### **A. AN EXAMINATION OF THE MEANS**

Society missionaries' patient internalization of local language and convention formed the mundane substrate supporting loftier Jesuit religious and philosophical ends. Cultural accommodation was central to Jesuit success, as "adaptation to local circumstances is basic to the Jesuit way of proceeding" (Ross in O'Malley, 1999, p. 348). Valignano recognized that foreign culture and Christianity could not combine without some transformation of both; neither Catholic rites and rituals nor the proselyte society would emerge unchanged:

Alessandro Valignano was able in Japan and even more spectacularly in China to develop Christian missionary activity sufficiently free from confinement in European forms to allow the Christian message genuinely to enter Japanese and Chinese society and culture and to develop Japanese and Chinese forms. This process was not one of the kernel becoming clothed in a new husk while remaining untouched, but a genuine attempt to translate the Gospel from one culture into another...in terms of elementary chemistry, what was coming into being as a result of this missionary strategy was a solution not a mixture

(Ross, in O'Malley 1999, p. 338).

Similarly, Valignano believed that in order to affect a transformative process, missionaries must also transform themselves, and in effect transform their ideology to resonate with local conceptions. Such adaptation required a great deal of preparation on the part of the missionary, and substantial trust on the part of church superiors. Jesuits' extensive training and education permitted an adaptive approach emphasizing individual initiative on both ends:

The Jesuit was conditioned to make the most effective choices himself, to further his ministry according to the situation at hand—

personal, social, political, and cultural—and to have confidence in doing so because of the spiritual certainty he had gained. It was this spiritual formation which helped give Valignano the confidence to break new ground. A radically new situation ought to bring forth a new approach, according to the Society's way of proceeding. Thus, along with their traditional Jesuit concern for adaptation and translation, the particular spiritual formation of these missionaries, which gave them the confidence to choose and follow what they judged to be the best way of carrying out their ministry, offers a key explanation of the dramatic missiological [sic] breakthrough led by Valignano

(Ross in O'Malley, 1999, p. 348).

Jesuits viewed their mission as more than just literal translation of Catholic tenets into a new tongue in an attempt to gain adherents on the strength of Christian ideology in isolation. Rather, Society missionaries believed that in order for a foreign philosophy to gain footing or prominence in any culture, advocates must sufficiently understand preexisting ideological notions in order to demonstrate a substantive link to the desired belief system. Jesuits also felt that little lasting influence could emerge unless missionaries demonstrated commendable behavior in the eyes of their potential proselytes, again impossible without a deep understanding of local language and values. Thus, a Jesuit in Japan only vaguely resembled a Jesuit in India, and neither could be mistaken for a Jesuit in Rome, yet all retained and advocated a fundamental Catholic foundation.

## **B. THE JESUIT SPECIAL OPERATIONS METHOD DISTILLED**

The Society's success in India, Japan, and China suggests a clear framework for political and cultural influence, heuristically applicable to special operations influence efforts. The most important element of this framework is an unambiguous understanding that the ideology of the parent organization will inevitably take on different characteristics as it takes root in a foreign culture. Even the most successful conversion effort will scarcely spawn an identical philosophical twin in a new address. Thus, advocates must identify and

indemnify their ideology's essential and nonnegotiable elements, but compromise enthusiastically on the remainder. Special operators must readily discard the comfortable nuances of familiar form to institute a proximally meaningful manifestation of their ideology.

Patience is the second most important ingredient to successful philosophical sway. Unlike U.S. special operations forces' serial temporary presence, each Jesuit missionary spent decades learning, serving, and influencing his assigned population. Such extended personal presence permitted rapport and trust between missionaries and local people, gave Jesuits a stake in local conditions, and allowed Society members to acquire the necessary understanding of language and culture. Further, a lasting presence allowed missionaries to carefully and gradually infuse the controversial elements of their religion, which the populace might otherwise have rejected outright without such a deliberate approach. Jesuit accomplishments suggest that significant differences in philosophy are best reconciled in small increments over a long time, by individuals who have taken the time to develop an enduring personal and institutional affiliation with their adopted community.

As Xavier learned in Japan, a thorough understanding of both language and culture invariably precedes lasting ideological influence. Because language is only grasped successfully within a complete cultural context, and cultural comprehension is impossible without literacy and fluency in the local dialect, missionaries and special operators must immerse themselves in both. Conversion is only possible with a firm grasp of the fundamentals of effective personal conduct and communication—as *defined by the local society, not the parent organization*. There is little hope of successfully altering values and philosophy if missionary or special operator speech and behavior inspire derision and disdain rather than trust and respect.

Only determined study and constant attention will reveal the difference between acceptable and abominable in a new society. As a general rule however, special operators should closely mirror in dress and conduct the

constituency they hope to influence and ultimately convert. It is extremely unlikely that philosophical operatives may bring ostentatious elements of their parent culture into the field for comfort or convenience without polarizing the local population. Nonnative creature comforts communicate a personal attitude of cultural reservation at best, and outright superiority at worst, and are counterproductive in the main. Ideological advocates are effective only when they embrace their new society, and learn to be at home within it. Personal adaptation permits successful conversion.

The preceding techniques work effectively in the long term only when they find application across the spectrum of a society's class and custom. The Society was successful largely because its leadership recognized the importance of working to influence the influential and convert commoners simultaneously. From the Jesuit perspective, a beneficial reciprocal relationship often developed between rulers and their subjects, wherein proselyte leaders urged hesitant followers to accept Jesuit philosophy, and the converted masses pressured reluctant rulers to consider Catholicism's merits. Such symbiosis required a well-conceived strategic approach at each level of societal function.

Gaining the trust and respect of each element within a culture is no small endeavor. A society's everyman and elite are often energized by a very different set of ideas and activities. Ideological advocates must therefore be conversant in a broad spectrum of disciplines, with sufficient social adeptness to adapt their demeanor and depth of discussion to match their current company. Erudition gains little footing among the working class, just as common topics hold little interest in privileged circles. Knowing the difference is often just as difficult as interacting effectively in either environment. Such *savoir-faire* emerges only after extensive education and experience. As the Society demonstrated, thorough personal preparation and scholarship precede effective influence. Jesuits were well equipped intellectually, socially, and philosophically, and their institutional ethos allowed them to enter the field with humility and reflection. They thoroughly

understood that at the confluence of ideologies, every tactical action reverberates strategically, and that even unintended affronts forestall the most magnanimous overture.

Education and preparation permit efficient adaptation, a necessary missionary and special operator skill. Trends in the collective opinion vary perpetually, and what is popular now will assuredly fall from favor shortly. As the Jesuit experience demonstrates, ideological advocates must therefore make a lasting and adaptable social, economic, and cultural contribution to their adopted society in order to weather the inevitable tides of public opinion. Just as Society missionaries maintained a foothold in foreign cultures during troubled times through substantial secular efforts, so must special operators demonstrate a lasting commitment to the local populace, independent of ideological aims. Meaningful practical contributions (across the gamut of a given society) facilitate philosophical and political influence, and are particularly useful in maintaining a presence when it would otherwise be politically or popularly impossible. It is extremely important to note, however, that socially relevant contributions are defined not by the parent organization, but by the local populace. It is impossible to gain favor by adding public value without a clear picture of what is collectively valuable.

Duignan summarizes the Jesuit approach succinctly: “Rather than destroy and condemn what they found, they tried to reshape and reorient existing practices and beliefs in order to establish a common ground on which to begin conversion. Then, by slowly proving the superiority of their own ideas, the Jesuits were able to work to win the souls of men with tact and forbearance, not with rudeness and impatience” (Duignan, 1958, p. 726). Understanding, accommodation, humility, and adaptation are necessary precursors of influence and conversion, whether the ideological advocate is an agent of church or nation.

Of equal importance, the parent polity must likewise accept that even the most fervent of its converts must necessarily retain substantive pre-conversion social elements in order to remain relevant within their native society. Without

such cultural carryovers, the parent ideology will undoubtedly fail. This truth carries a profound implication for the sponsoring ideological agency, religious or political: translation implies transformation, and any philosophy must evolve as it expands. No party emerges from the conversion process unchanged. Ideological arbiter, agent, and convert must each adapt substantively. Inherent intolerance must be expected and patiently overcome within the native society, but it must be eradicated at every level within the proselytizing organization. Otherwise, the message will remain inaudible beneath the din of the delivery.

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